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ABSTRACT

This booklet explains the importance of teachers being trained to handle daily crises they face in their classrooms and to see crises as an opportunity for both students and teachers. It discusses the skills and attitudes teachers need in order to be effective crisis managers. After an introduction, three sections examine: "What Is a Crisis?" (characteristics of students in crisis, types of crises, and severity of crisis situations); "Preventing a Crisis" (teacher behaviors that contribute to crisis situations, identification and management of troubled students, violence prevention programs, responding to crisis situations, and formal programs); and "Four Case Studies" (a first grade fight, a bad girl, a troubled girl in a new school, and the stolen boom box). The booklet concludes that when teachers do not respond correctly: there is a breakdown in the classroom; there can be serious injury; there is marked decrease in teacher morale and increase in burnout; and there may be lawsuits. Failing to intervene in crisis situations means that teachers have lost the opportunity to help students. When teachers reach out to troubled students, they have the opportunity to change lives. A list of resources is included. (Contains 29 references.) (SM)

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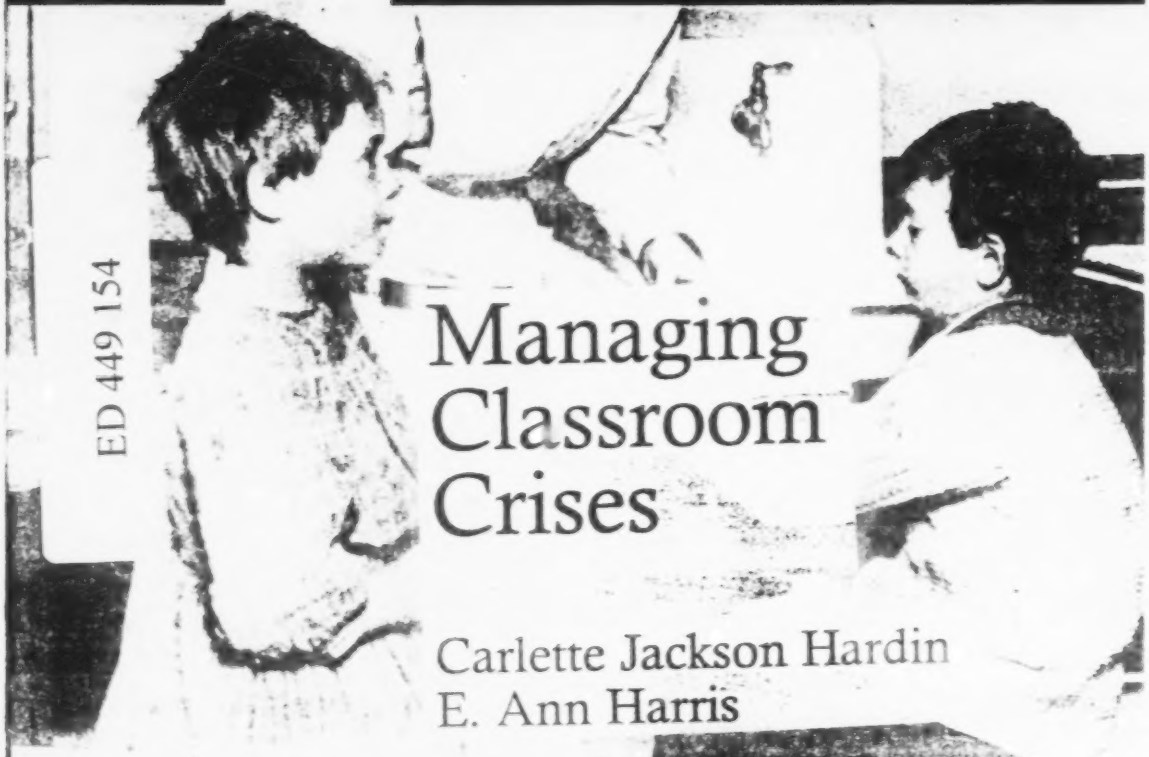

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Managing Classroom Crises

Carlette Jackson Hardin
E. Ann Harris

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Series Editor, Donovan R. Walling

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by
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and
E. Ann Harris

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Introduction

After the horrors of Littleton and Paducah, school systems across the country developed crisis intervention plans. They established crisis teams and have provided them with extensive training in handling life-threatening situations. Millions were spent on training, personnel, materials, and safety equipment.

Unfortunately, many of these plans do not provide classroom teachers with appropriate training to deal with the daily crises they face in their classrooms. Peterson (1997) found that teacher training was ranked as the least used strategy in a list of 10 strategies implemented by schools to prevent crises. The teacher training that has taken place often consists only of explaining how to refer students with troubling behaviors to better-trained professionals. Such training fails to deal with the most fundamental issue facing the classroom teacher: the appropriate interaction between a teacher and the student in crisis.

The failure to train teachers is a terrible mistake because teachers have more contact with children than do other adults in a school. As Noguera (1996) stresses,

those responsible for implementing crisis management plans become so preoccupied with controlling students and ensuring safety that they forget that the primary responsibility of teachers is to create classrooms that are centers of learning where children receive intellectual and psychological nurturing.

Most crises faced by classroom teachers do not make the evening news. The majority of classroom crises are not life-threatening, but such crises can be life-changing. If crisis situations are not handled correctly, students in crisis may face a lifetime of emotional problems, academic failure, or violence toward others or themselves. When children are bullied and ridiculed by classmates, the hurt and anger may not present itself until years later. When children feel their teachers care nothing about their feelings, they withdraw physically and emotionally from the classroom. When children fail to learn effective problem-solving skills, they face years of failed personal and professional relationships. While all crisis situations do not threaten personal safety, they still negatively affect the learning environment, disrupting learning for all students. While these crises pale when compared with the events making the nightly news, they are devastating for the students, their classmates, and classroom teachers.

One of the most critical factors in preventing a crisis is a positive relationship with a teacher who is available to provide support when needed (U.S. Departments of Education and Justice 1998). Certainly there are situations that will escalate into a crisis regardless of what an individual teacher does or does not do. However,

teachers themselves can escalate or de-escalate a situation by their interactions with students.

Classroom teachers must be trained to handle the daily crises they face in their classrooms. They also must be trained to see a crisis as an opportunity for both students and teachers. For students, a crisis is an opportunity to learn to solve problems, to deal with difficult situations and people, and to find options where there had been none. For teachers, a crisis is an opportunity to develop skills in handling troubling situations and students. The effective management of crisis situations is an opportunity to promote personal growth and enhance self-esteem through the mastery of difficult circumstances.

Ginott (1972) stresses that teachers successful in dealing with crisis situations combine skills with an attitude of caring, trust, respect, honesty, and support. This fastback will deal with the skills and attitudes needed by teachers to be effective crisis managers.

What Is a Crisis

Before teachers can help students deal with a crisis, they must be able to identify when students are in crises. This is not as easy as it seems, because a crisis is self-defined (TCRS 1999). What is a crisis for one student may not be a crisis for another, and a life-threatening situation for a student may not be viewed as serious by an adult. Time and setting also affect what will become a crisis; what causes a crisis today may not have triggered a crisis yesterday. And students who have coped with many changes in their lives (for example, divorce or death of parents, a move to new home and school) may go into crisis when another, less significant event occurs (for example, losing a book).

A teacher must know the students beyond a superficial level in order to recognize when a student is in crisis. The teacher must recognize subtle changes in the student. Thus a teacher may overlook a crisis state in a student who has just recently moved to a classroom. In addition, a high school or middle school teacher may not notice problems that would be detected by an elementary teacher who spends much more time with a student.

A crisis has some of the same characteristics as stress. Both are a result of the demands and tensions felt by the student and both are measured subjectively (CCCL 1999). However, there is a realistic appraisal of the event in stress, while in a crisis the student's perception of events is distorted. In addition, the student in stress has personal support and coping mechanisms, whereas the student in crisis feels that there are no adequate support or coping mechanisms. In a crisis, the problem is unresolved and the student begins to panic. As the crisis intensifies, the situation seems insurmountable, and the student displays characteristics that signal the need for adult intervention.

Characteristics of Students in Crisis

A student in crisis often changes his or her typical behavior. If the student typically is quiet, a crisis may cause the student to be extremely distressed or to act out. The acting-out student may be sullen or may appear withdrawn. It is critical that the teacher knows the student well enough to recognize these changes.

Students in crisis display a sharp rise in emotional energy and turmoil. They cannot think of appropriate ways to solve the problem and will vent their distress verbally or physically (Callahan 1998). In these cases, body language, such as stares, glares, or obscene gestures, signal potential problems. There also is a loss of control, loss of judgment, loss of clear thinking, and loss of ability to follow directions.

When in crisis, students have a disturbance in thinking. They are unable to perceive events accurately. They

may not focus well enough to see a solution. Normal processes, such as the ability to hear, think logically, and react normally, are limited. Concern for self increases (Callahan 1998). As the crisis escalates, students are less likely to respond to others in an appropriate fashion and often display antisocial behavior, which results in rejection by others (Meadows, Melloy, and Yell 1996).

A student in crisis has an urgent need to work toward resolution. The need to resolve the problem is partly biological; the body seeks a resolution so that it can return to a state of equilibrium. This desperate need to resolve the crisis, coupled with the student's inability to think logically, creates a potentially explosive situation. The student reacts in a way that threatens relationships with others and in a way that may threaten the student's own life.

Types of Crises

Meadows and her colleagues (1996) note that it is important for teachers and other adults to be able to identify the type of crisis the student is experiencing because different types of crisis demand different types of intervention.

Bolt from the Blue Crisis. A common type of crisis occurs when there is a sudden, unexpected event in the student's life. This "Bolt from the Blue Crisis" catches the student and teacher unaware, and they have little time to deal with the situation. News that someone has been injured or has died might create such a crisis. A student not prone to crisis reactions during normal circumstances might experience a crisis in these unexpected situations.

The less experience the student has coping with such events, the greater the likelihood of a crisis.

Developmental Crisis. Some students enter a crisis state because of the expectations and role changes resulting from growing older. Some students experience developmental crises as they start school, move to middle school, or face graduation. While everyone goes through transitions between the stages of life, some children experience a developmental crisis as they move from stage to stage (CCCL 1999). Such transitions can become crises because they involve periods of severe and prolonged stress.

Exacerbation Crisis. This type of crisis involves a situation where functioning has been at a low level and many continuing problems already exist. When an additional stressor is added, a "straw that breaks the camel's back" syndrome develops. For example, a student who suffers from an academic, physical, emotional, or behavioral disorder may enter a crisis when additional stressors are encountered. Gable, Bullock, and Harder (1995) note that the effects of added stress to a student in a crisis state are multiplicative, rather than cumulative, creating a very difficult situation for the student and for those trying to offer assistance.

Relationship Crisis. This type of crisis results from a breakdown in a relationship. While the relationship may be one outside the school, it also can be one between the student and another student or a teacher. Kriedler (1984) found that a relationship crisis in the classroom may be the result of a competitive atmosphere, intolerant behavior of classmates (including cliques and

scapegoating), racial or cultural intolerance by students and teachers, poor communication, inappropriate expression of emotions, or misuse of power by the teacher.

Severity of Crisis Situations

Regardless of the type of crisis the student is experiencing, the severity of the crisis situation depends on several factors (CCCL 1999):

Intensity of the Event: The more a triggering event affects the child personally, the stronger its effect. However, it is important to remember that the effect is determined by the individual. While a school would prepare for crisis situations after the death of a student in the school, teachers might be unprepared for the impact of the death of a student from another school or even in another state. Since it cannot be determined how a student will internalize an event, the intensity of the event might not be evident.

Suddenness: When an unexpected crisis develops, neither the student nor the teacher is prepared. If it is the first time a student has experienced a particular emotion (for example, grief or hurt from a failed relationship), the student will not have developed the coping skills to deal with the pain. The student has no way to know that the pain eventually will ease and life will go on.

Duration: When the stressful events continue over an extended period, the child's psychological and physical capacity to cope will fail. In order to get relief, the student may take actions that are not productive and, in many cases, are harmful.

Ability to Understand: Students, especially young children, expect fairness. Thus they have a hard time understanding events when their sense of fairness is removed. When students feel they have no control, when they do not understand why a situation happened, or when there is a sense that they have been wronged, they can have crisis reaction.

Stability of Student: When children are not equipped with a repertoire of behaviors that allow them to deal with a stressful situation, the likelihood of a crisis increases. Therefore, even subtle changes in a low-functioning student should be viewed as the potential for a crisis reaction.

A student in crisis is overwhelmed by emotions: fear, anxiety, anger, confusion, guilt, and grief. The student mobilizes all internal and external resources in hopes of finding a resolution. They have a heightened suggestibility and are vulnerable to both good and bad advice. Therefore it is critical that it is a caring adult who reaches out to help the student find a resolution to the crisis situation.

Preventing a Crisis

The old adage, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," is especially true in crisis management. Fortunately, as Bender and McLaughlin (1997) note, most crisis prevention can be done within the normal context of a teacher's day. Effective crisis prevention consists of three parts:

1. Eliminating teacher behaviors that contribute to crisis situations.
2. Identifying and managing troubled students.
3. Developing conflict- and violence-prevention programming.

Teacher Behaviors that Contribute to Crisis Situations

While it is important to know how to respond to a crisis, it is even more important for teachers to understand how their actions can contribute to crisis situations. Such understanding begins with the personal behaviors and attitudes of the teacher and includes the way in which instruction is presented and the classroom is managed.

As Carpenter (1998) stresses, teachers cannot promote character development for students unless teachers

themselves are models of good character. It is critical that teachers demonstrate self-discipline and good manners. Good role models have no tantrums, make no insults, and never use the tactics that they wish to eradicate to correct a problem. They do not raise their voices to end noise. They do not use force to break up fighting. They are not rude to children who are impolite. They never berate a child in front of other classmates. Teachers skilled at crisis prevention never waste time and energy on battles that can be avoided (Ginott 1972).

Crisis prevention begins with treating all students with respect. A major source of conflict in many schools is the perceived or real problem of bias and unfair treatment of students. Research indicates that students who have been treated unfairly become either scapegoats and targets of violence or the aggressors acting out toward those they feel have wronged them (U.S. Departments of Education and Justice 1998). Having a positive relationship with students and treating them with respect may not prevent a crisis situation, but the rapport and the trust it establishes will allow the teacher an opportunity to intervene.

Meadows and her colleagues (1996) argue that not only is it important for teachers to know how to respond to a crisis, it is equally important for them to understand that establishing and maintaining a productive learning environment can reduce the need to deal with crisis situations.

A compelling body of research points to factors relating to the classroom itself that contribute to student aggression and acting-out behaviors (Gable et al. 1997).

Gaustad (1992) identified such conditions as inappropriate classroom placement, irrelevant instruction, inconsistent management of the classroom, rigid and unreasonable classroom behavioral demands, unclear rules or rules that are not enforced consistently, misconduct that is ignored, poor cooperation between teachers and administrators, and insensitivity to student diversity.

Identification and Management of Troubled Students

Teachers must recognize when children pose a threat to themselves or others. Teachers can gather information about students from observations, the students themselves, classmates, or overheard conversations. However, teachers sometimes find it difficult to separate dangerous behaviors, such as bullying or harassment, from the normal teasing and horsing-around that regularly occurs in schools. When teachers do not recognize the differences between problem behaviors and harmless play, they can ignore behaviors that may signal potential aggression or violence (Hazler 1998). In addition, teachers must not ignore violent behavior in very young children in the belief that these children will simply "grow out of it."

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (1996) argues that the presence of one or more of the following behaviors increases the risk of violent or dangerous behavior:

- Having a history of violent or aggressive behavior, including uncontrollable, angry outbursts.

- Being a victim of abuse or neglect.
- Witnessing abuse or violence in the home.
- Bullying or intimidating peers or younger children.
- Having recent experience of humiliation, shame, loss, or rejection.
- Bringing a weapon to school.
- Coping with a combination of stressful family factors, such as poverty, severe deprivation, or marital breakup.
- Suffering from a mental illness, such as depression, mania, psychosis, or bipolar disorder.
- Belonging to a cult or gang.
- Withdrawing socially because of depression, rejection, persecution, unworthiness, or lack of confidence.
- Failing to adjust to a new school after an adequate amount of time.

Many teachers viewing this list would note that almost every student in their classrooms fits in at least one of the categories, but few students become a threat or act in an aggressive manner. Thus it should be remembered that these are only early warning signs that should alert teachers to show concern for a child (U.S. Departments of Education and Justice 1998.) Teachers must avoid inappropriately labeling or stigmatizing a student because he or she appears to fit a profile or a set of early warning indicators. If teachers have established a close, caring, and supportive relationship with their students, they will know their students well enough to know when a student's history plus current behaviors signal the potential for future problems.

However, all children who make threats should be taken seriously. The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (1996) stresses that no threat should be dismissed as just idle talk. Not all threats are verbal, and teachers should be conscious of hidden messages in students' papers. Essays, stories, and poetry that discuss suicide or life-threatening issues may signal an obsession with the topic. Teachers must not be afraid to react and should talk to the student about what they have written. While it might be true that the teacher may have just read the work of a budding Stephen King, it is probable that it was written by a troubled student crying out for help.

A single educator cannot handle a major crisis situation alone. When a teacher recognizes the warning signs of a crisis situation, the teacher should seek the involvement of a mental health professional. The immediate evaluation and appropriate treatment of a child who makes serious threats can help the troubled child and reduce the risk of tragedy.

Violence Prevention Programs

Gold and Chamberlin (1996) note that all children who eventually are identified as juvenile delinquents could have been reliably identified by age eight. Thus successful violence prevention and conflict resolution programs are provided in the early grades, where the habits of peacemaking are first being learned. These programs also are presented throughout middle and high school in the hope that if violence has been learned, it can be unlearned. Remboldt states that "the key to

preventing violence lies in shaping children's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors before violence becomes an automatic manifestation of their anger" (1998, p. 33).

Girard (1995) found that there were approximately 50 school-based conflict resolution programs in 1984. By 1995 the number of such programs had risen to 5,000, and the number continues to rise. Peterson (1997) argues that the teaching of some form of conflict mediation, negotiation procedures, and conflict resolution skills should be included in the curriculum of every classroom.

Classroom curriculum, classroom management, and school-based programs are the main sources for conflict resolutions programs in schools. In addition, conflict resolution is used by some teachers as part of their classroom management practices, and they teach problem resolution as part of the discipline plan. Many schools have adopted schoolwide programs where participation, support, and resources extend beyond a single classroom.

Girard (1995) identified four distinct types of programs for crisis and violence prevention. Violence prevention programs identify the causes and results of violent behaviors. Conflict resolution programs provide strategies that enable students to handle conflicts peacefully and cooperatively outside the traditional disciplinary procedures. Peer mediation is a specific form of conflict resolution using students as neutral third parties in resolving disputes. A peaceable classroom program teaches the values and skills of cooperation, communication, tolerance, positive emotional expression, and

conflict resolution. In addition, many schools have established character development programs to promote the concepts of good morals, positive character development, and good citizenship.

Examples of such programs are provided in the case studies presented in the next section. A resource list for schoolwide programs appears at the end of this fastback.

Responding to Crisis Situations

The previous chapter provided strategies for preventing crisis situations. However, it is critical for teachers to know not only effective preventive strategies but also effective strategies for responding to a crisis situation once it has begun. Teachers must use skills, strategies, and techniques to handle crises in a proactive way; reactive responses are counterproductive.

Many of these strategies require nothing more than the teacher being a caring, compassionate individual. As Callahan (1998) notes, teachers need to know how to intervene with an upset student in a way that does not create a greater risk. It is the responsibility of the teacher not to panic and to be the calming factor in crisis situations by:

1. *Listen!* As simple as it sounds, the most important way to deal with a crisis situation is to listen. Listening is the foundation of crisis management (CCCL 1999). Listening to students alerts teachers to potential problems. It is the most important way in which teachers show they care about students. And as students talk

about what is troubling them, they often realize that the situation is not as serious as they once believed.

2. *Deal with small problems while they are small.* As Trump (1998) notes, many crisis situations are a result of rumors, boyfriend or girlfriend conflicts, or issues of real or perceived disrespect. The teacher should not assume that the issue will blow over but should intervene early and help students resolve their conflicts before a crisis develops.

3. *Help students resolve the problem verbally, rather than physically.* Teachers need to acknowledge the student's anger or hostility and to ask direct questions. There is an increased chance to defuse a crisis situation when the teacher can lead the student back to verbal interaction. If a teacher can focus on the student and what the student is saying, then the teacher may be successful in aborting a full-blown crisis.

4. *Respect the student's personal space.* A student in crisis may need more personal space than usual. If the student makes a fist, tightens the facial muscles, and moves away, the student is signaling that personal space is being invaded. Teachers need to be aware of their own body language and the message they are sending.

5. *Permit verbal venting when possible.* Teachers accomplish nothing when they get in a shouting match with students. Instead of acting in a manner that will create more of a problem, the teacher must focus on reducing the crisis. While the teacher might not like what the student says or feels attacked, the teacher's job is to defuse the situation, not to get in a power play. When venting, students may not respond to specific words;

but they will respond to tone of voice, proximity, or body posture.

6. *Address the problem privately.* Speaking to a student privately allows both the teacher and the student to "save face." When in front of peers, students may say and do things they would never do in private. And a teacher who needs to be viewed as the authority can lose control when a verbal conflict erupts between the teacher and a student. Speaking to students privately helps preserve the integrity and self-esteem of both the teacher and students.

7. *Help the student solve the problem.* Two factors determine how involved a teacher should become in finding the solution to a problem: who is involved in the problem and the age of the student. If the problem is between a student and the teacher, the teacher must be involved in the solution. If the problem is between a student and another student, the teacher may act as facilitator or refer the students to peer mediation. If the student is in middle or high school, the teacher may act as a "sounding board" as the student reviews several options for solving the problem. If the student is in elementary school, the teacher may need to suggest solutions or actively intervene if the student is not mentally, emotionally, or physically capable of solving the problem. The goal is to help the student to develop skills that will serve a lifetime.

Formal Programs

In addition to actions the teacher can take alone, many schools use specific prevention, intervention, and

remediation programs. These can include individualized behavior plans, classroom plans, and schoolwide programs. Whatever approach is accepted, the ultimate goal is to instill in students the attitudes, values, and abilities needed to regulate their own behavior (Gregg 1998).

Prevention programs include strategies that teach prosocial skills in an interactive way, such as role-playing or by using manipulatives. Intervention programs involve techniques and strategies with an additional correction for aggression. Remediation programs are provided for deeply troubled and violently aggressive youth who cannot function in a regular classroom. All of these programs include three components: what behavior is expected, what support will be given by adults (teachers, parents, counselors, etc.), and what corrective action will be taken for inappropriate behaviors (Canter and Canter 1993).

Four Case Studies

Four case studies are presented to illustrate crisis situations in which teachers or administrators were reactive rather than proactive in their responses. These case studies provide examples of crisis situations from early grades to high school. They also represent a variety of types of crises. While each differs in the situation and its intensity, they are similar in that teachers and administrators could have intervened in such a way to prevent the situation from occurring.

A First-Grade Fight

In a rural, first-grade classroom, several children are playing blocks at one table. A problem has been brewing for several weeks, seemingly unknown to the teacher, Mrs. Moore. First-grader Erin Jones has been experiencing teasing, name-calling, and harassment from several children in the class, but mostly from Alex Smith. On this particular Friday, three boys are playing a game on the floor when Erin tries to join in the game.

Alex stops him: "You get out of here. We don't want you playing with us. You smell! And your clothes are funny. I heard they came from Goodwill and your mother's a hooker!"

"She is not! You take that back about my mother!" yells Erin.

By now, all of the children have stopped playing to watch what is happening. The two boys begin to shove each other. They fall against the table, scattering blocks everywhere. One little girl begins to cry because she had just finished building a house of blocks.

Mrs. Moore, who has been sorting papers, finally notices. "What's going on here? Are you two boys at it again? You are driving me crazy. I'm going to call your parents."

Analysis: Many would wonder if a classroom eruption between two first-graders should be considered a crisis. Yet how this particular relationship crisis is handled is critical for the healthy development of both Erin and Alex. Even in elementary school, bullying and harassment should never be ignored, because children do not outgrow violent behavior or the propensity toward violent reaction (Richardson and Evans 1993). If the teacher does not intervene properly, Erin may face a lifetime of poor self-esteem and withdrawal. The harassment he feels can manifest itself in aggression toward himself or others. If Alex does not learn to respect the diversity of the children he encounters, he can become an aggressor, acting out toward others who seem weak or different. This is a critical time in the relationship between Alex and Erin, and they need a caring adult to help them resolve their differences.

A teacher can best teach children prosocial skills during their elementary years (Sautter 1995). Therefore it is

important for Mrs. Moore to create a caring community in the classroom. Seeing that problems have been developing between Erin and the other students, she should have planned activities to engage the boys in collaborative activities in which they laugh together, work together, and depend on each other to reach common goals. The classroom climate should be supportive of diversity in thought, socioeconomic level, and interests (CCCL 1999). Instead, Erin's classroom was one in which the teacher had not learned how to help children relate to each other.

One of the reasons children do not use appropriate social behavior is lack of modeling. Seeing that Erin was the class outcast, Mrs. Moore should have modeled acceptance. She should have gone out of her way to show Erin and the other students that he was accepted and appreciated in the classroom. However, she ignored the problem; and when a crisis developed, she resorted to yelling and intimidation, sending a message to both Erin and Alex that her actions were appropriate behavior. Instead of meeting anger with anger, she should have been sensitive and aware to signs of inner conflict and potential problems between the boys.

Because Mrs. Moore did not intervene, the situation between the boys escalated until they were fighting. She must now work with the students to help them become part of the classroom again. Erin and Alex need to be given the chance to "save face" in front of their peers. They both need time to calm down. Afterward, Mrs. Moore should discuss what happened and what should have happened, and then follow through with what they will do the next time the situation occurs.

Because of the problem that had developed in her classroom, Mrs. Moore may want to incorporate conflict resolution skills through the use of bibliotherapeutic children's literature. While there are many structured character education programs, perhaps one of the easiest ways in the early years to teach character development is using bibliotherapeutic children's literature during reading time. Many authors, notably Dr. Seuss, have written numerous books that promote peace, understanding of others, and positive character traits. These books give teachers a fun way to teach values and to interest students in meaningful class discussions about the story characters' positive and negative behaviors (Pace and Podesta 1999).

A Bad Grade

Vincent Graham was a fourth-grader in a small, rural, elementary school. He was experiencing academic problems with several subjects, especially math and science. The report cards had been given out on Friday of the previous week. Vincent had received several C's and a D in science.

On Monday Vincent appeared quieter than usual. Several attempts at his written morning work ended in crumpled wads of paper on his desk. His face was twisted in a frown, and he could be seen chewing his fingernails periodically.

Mrs. Graves, the classroom teacher, began the first period by handing back a writing project in science that she had graded over the weekend. Several of the stu-

dents had done well, and Mrs. Graves had complimentary remarks to each student in the class as she handed them their papers. When she gave Vincent his paper, he grabbed it and became belligerent, yelling, "Why is this a C? I wrote a good paper. You cheated me! You teachers are all cheaters!"

The teacher, trying to calm Vincent, said emphatically, "Young man, you be quiet this instant. Your paper was graded fairly. Apparently, you didn't pay attention to the assignment or you would have done better."

At this point, Vincent sprang out of his chair and defiantly yelled, "You just don't like me. I hate you and I hate this school!"

By now the whole class was watching in amazement. Mrs. Graves moved in front of Vincent and shook her finger in his face to get his full attention. "Young man, if you don't calm down and sit down, I'll send you to the principal and call your mother!"

Vincent replied, "I don't care, go ahead and call my mother. I won't do anything you say!" And with that remark, Vincent ran from the room. He ran down the hall and left the school, using the gymnasium door. He hid in the bushes down the road from school until it was time for school to be over.

Analysis: Vincent is experiencing a relationship crisis, and what had begun as a breakdown in the relationship of Vincent and his parents has now resulted in a breakdown of the relationship between Vincent and his teacher. Several events at home from Friday through the weekend have caused his release of anger and hostility.

Here again is a classic scenario of a teacher ignoring many warning signs and subconscious cries for help. Rather than recognizing the apparent physical signs of distress (that is, frowning, chewing fingernails, agitation), the teacher exhibited a knee-jerk reaction, counterproductive to what needed to be accomplished; and a serious problem unfolded. Ignoring the warning signs intensified the crisis.

Once Vincent verbalized his anger in front of his peers, nothing was accomplished by engaging him in a power play. Mrs. Graves should remember when school attendance is not a positive experience, students may not care what they say or do. Rather than arguing with Vincent, she should have sent him from the room so that he would have had a chance to calm down. Once he was calmer, Mrs. Graves needed to acknowledge his distress and the fact that his grade had improved. She needed to investigate why he is having problems and to offer to help him find a way to improve his grades. It might have been necessary for his parents to become involved in the discussion so that any extra help (tutoring or referral for testing) could be provided. Above all, Vincent needed to know that his teacher recognized his desire to do well, and he needed to recognize her willingness to help him succeed.

Students can change disruptive behaviors if provided with the needed academic skills, social skills, attention and encouragement, and support. Mrs. Graves cannot wave a magic wand and eliminate problems students bring to the classroom, but she certainly can control her own responses to these students' behaviors; and that, in turn, can change lives.

A Troubled Girl in a New School

Jane Ellis has been sent to live with her grandmother after being expelled from a school in New York. In New York, eighth-grader Jane had hit her English teacher after the teacher had tried to forcefully remove Jane from her classroom. Now she is in a new town and a new school.

Jane was determined to fit in at her new school, but within a week someone had learned about what had happened in New York, and the students were talking about her behind her back. In the week she had been in school, no one had tried to make friends with her, and most conversations stopped whenever she was around.

Jane finally decided she had to talk to someone. Because her math teacher, Mr. Owens, seemed nice, she decided to talk to him. Before school started, she went into Mr. Owens' room and asked him if she could talk with him. He told her he was busy getting ready for class and couldn't talk at that time.

As the day progressed, Jane became increasingly angry. It seemed that no one liked her. People stopped talking when she walked by. At lunch she could tell that the girls at the next table were talking about her. Finally, no longer able to control herself, she walked over to the girls and asked, "What in the hell is so funny?"

Seeing that a problem was about to occur, the assistant principal came over to the girls' table. He asked Jane to go back to her table. When she didn't answer him and refused to move, he reached out his arm to move her. Jane threw his arm away from her and told him to "get out of my face." She picked up her lunch

and ran from the room, exclaiming that she hated the school and everyone in it.

Analysis: How did the local school and Jane's teachers' fail her? When she entered the school, Jane should have been quickly identified as a troubled youth. With her history of violent behavior and the stresses of moving away from her family and into a new home, the school should have provided intervention for Jane on her first day. In the weeks that followed her entry into the school, the fact that Jane was a loner with no friends should have been noticed. Meadows and her colleagues (1996) note that being rejected by other students is devastating to adolescents. The adults around Jane should have noted this rejection and intervened. Having records available from her previous schools would have forewarned faculty and administrators and given them a better understanding of Jane's potential problems. Not only would her teachers have been informed and on the alert to "red flags" that Jane was not integrating well into the school, but a plan could have been developed for Jane so she would have known what was expected from her and to whom she could go to for assistance.

Jane is experiencing an exacerbation crisis; she came to the school with a multitude of problems, and her interaction with the girls in the cafeteria has become the breaking point. Jane needed a place to go for confidential talks with guidance counselors and teachers as she worked on the transition from her old school to her new situation. Jane needed to know she was welcome and that she could fit it. Peer mentors should have been se-

lected to provide positive integration into the social and academic environment.

It was evident Jane issued a cry for help when she attempted to find counsel with her favorite teacher, Mr. Owens. Unfortunately, Mr. Owens ignored these cries. Even with a hectic schedule, a time could and should have been set to talk to Jane, rather than just sending her away. Myles and Simpson (1994) stress that when a student is frustrated, agitated, or angry, expressing concern frequently has positive effects. A few minutes given to hear Jane's concerns could have been the major turning point in a positive direction for Jane. When her cries for help were ignored, Jane's situation escalated beyond her control.

Once the disruptive behavior began, the assistant principal also was reactive in his intervention attempt. He gave a noninformational directive, rather than addressing Jane in a way that would soothe her anger or provide her with time to calm down. He should have tried to get her to talk in a nonthreatening atmosphere away from the problem situation. When anger can be articulated in some nonviolent way, there is hope for self-understanding and healing. Anger left unresolved pushes students into violence toward self or others (Hanson and Hanson 1999).

To make matters worse, the assistant principal invaded Jane's personal space in a confrontational manner. The assistant principal should have noted Jane's body language and have been more aware of his own nonverbal cues that were seen as threatening by Jane.

Not only did the present school fail Jane, but the previous school's attempt to manage conflict resolution

apparently involved the typical modes of discipline sadly repeated in many places today, (referrals to the principal, detention, suspension, and expulsion). The problem behavior remained unresolved and the skills needed by the student to settle disputes were unlearned.

The Stolen Boom Box

Joey Foster is an eleventh-grader in a local high school. Over the weekend, Joey bought a new boom box and was very proud of it. He had placed it in his locker and was planning to show it to some friends at lunchtime. However, when he returned to retrieve the boom box, it was not in his locker. He was visibly upset. Where could the radio be?

He asked several people around his locker if they knew who took his boom box. Some said they saw Mike, the new boy in the school, close to his locker after P.E. class. "He probably took it," thought Joey.

Mr. Harvey, the P.E. teacher, noticed Joey staying longer than usual at the locker area. "What's the problem, Joey?" asked Mr. Harvey.

"Someone has taken my new radio from my locker and I think I know who," replied Joey.

Mr. Harvey replied impatiently: "Joey, you know you weren't supposed to bring that to school. And besides, you probably left it someplace else. You need to get to the lunchroom with the rest of your class. You're late already. Let's go now and clear this hall."

Joey could not eat lunch. He kept glancing at the new boy, Mike. Joey thought that Mike looked nervous. "Probably feeling guilty," Joey thought.

Joey could stand it no longer. He got up, slammed his lunch tray on the counter, and walked hurriedly to where Mike was just standing to take his own lunch tray to the counter. "I know you took my radio, so give it back right now," yelled Joey. "Did you hear me? I want my radio NOW!" And with that remark Joey shoved Mike, causing Mike to drop his lunch tray. The tray hit the floor with a loud crash, and all the students eating nearby stopped and yelled encouragement to Joey. "Yea, right on, Joey, you tell him!"

The assistant principal was stationed by the door, directing traffic down the lunch line, when he heard the commotion. He yelled at the students who were encouraging the encounter to "Shut up!"

Joey was visibly upset and punched Mike in the cheek. Mike grabbed Joey, and they both fell to the floor. Mrs. Foster, a math teacher, ran over to the boys and tried to break up the fight by yelling, "Stop, stop this instant!"

Analysis: Joey is experiencing a Bolt from the Blue Crisis because he was totally unprepared for the loss of this radio. His reactions were fueled by the ineffective responses of several teachers and administrators to his problem. Joey was thinking and responding with an adolescent mind, not as an adult; but to the adults around him, Joey's reactions seemed out of proportion to the event, thus signaling the beginning of a crisis situation. There also might have been other pressures unknown to anyone but Joey that made losing the radio a major catastrophe. Perhaps he had worked many hours

to purchase the radio or had been told by his parents not to bring it to school.

Joey's situation illustrates the negative outcomes that result from poorly managed conflicts. Mr. Harvey needed to be more aware of Joey's extreme reaction to the loss of his radio. His comments that Joey shouldn't have brought the radio to school or that Joey should now go to the lunchroom were degrading at a time when Joey needed assistance, not criticism. If Mr. Harvey had properly dealt with the rumors started by Joey's classmates, the later escalation would have been avoided. The aggression toward Mike might have been avoided by a simple discussion of who else might have the combination to Joey's locker. Through this dialogue, Joey might have remembered that both his younger brother and his friend, David, had the combination to his locker and that one of them could have borrowed the radio.

The teachers and administrators in the cafeteria should have paid attention to Joey's nonverbal cues that signaled the intensity of the situation.

Joey's peers contributed to this situation both when they suggested that Mike had taken the radio and when they encouraged the fight in the cafeteria.

Once Joey started his aggression against Mike, he could see no way to end the conflict peacefully. With only his personal interests uppermost in his mind, Joey felt he must succeed in order to "save face" with his peers. Now that Joey has falsely accused a classmate of taking his radio, something must be done to resolve the relationship between the two boys. In the best case, Joey understands his mistake, apologizes to Mike, and they

continue as if the situation never happened. If Joey is unwilling to apologize or Mike is unwilling to accept his apology, the boys should be referred to a peer mediation program. In fact, as Peterson (1997) found, the majority of referred conflicts include all the elements of Joey's crisis (that is, rumors, suspicions, verbal aggression, stolen property, and fighting).

More students than ever before come from dysfunctional families and display aggressive tendencies and problematic behaviors, and they are being educated in regular classrooms. Thus the lack of teacher training in crisis prevention and resolution becomes increasingly evident. Educators realize that neither learning nor teaching can occur in a classroom where threats, harassment, intimidation, or unsafe conditions exist. Therefore teachers must learn the strategies, techniques, and methods that will best provide a peaceful environment in which all students can learn.

Conclusion

There is too much at stake for teachers to ignore students in distress. Nor can teachers afford to ignore the opportunities for dealing effectively with crisis situations by preventing those they can prevent and responding correctly to those they cannot prevent.

What happens when teachers don't respond correctly? First, there is a breakdown in the classroom. Even if the crisis situation does not threaten personal safety, it negatively affects the learning environment. Time taken to deal with an out-of-control student interrupts lessons for all students, and the student in crisis loses even more time. In many cases, the crisis situation that starts in one class affects every student in the school. Unfortunately, as in the case of Littleton or Paducah, these crises can affect every student in the nation.

Second, when crises are not contained, they can result in serious injury to the student experiencing the crisis or to those around him or her. As the Professional Crisis Management Association (1997) stresses, crisis situations rarely heal themselves. If teachers do not take effective measures, the situation will escalate. When aggression and disruptions are not handled properly, they

ultimately lead to a stressful and highly dangerous classroom.

Third, when educational goals cannot be achieved or met, there is a marked decrease in teacher morale and an increase in burnout, absenteeism, and turnover. The National Center for Education Statistics and Bureau of Justice Statistics (1998) found that crisis situations take a personal toll on teachers. Trump (1998) stresses that stories of school violence, aggression, and daily classroom crises make it difficult to retain and recruit teachers.

Fourth, teachers who fail to respond effectively to crisis situations may face lawsuits for negligence or incompetence. Teachers can be held personally liable if crisis situations are handled improperly or if there is a failure to act when action is clearly necessary to ensure safety. For teachers to avoid such suits they must show reasonable care during the crisis, intervene within the limits of their background and training, maintain their intervention until the student is out of crisis or someone with greater skill intervenes, maintain confidentiality about all the information concerning the crisis and the student, and document everything said and done with a student in a crisis.

Most important, failing to intervene in a crisis situation means there has been a lost opportunity to help a child. If teachers do not help their troubled students, these students may face a lifetime of emotional problems, academic failure, or violence toward others or themselves. When teachers reach out to a troubled student, they have the opportunity to change a life. What could be more important?

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Resources

Children's Creative Response to Conflict
Fellowship of Reconciliation
Box 271
Nyack, NY 10960

This approach is based on a series of activities for K-12 classrooms that stress cooperation, communication, affirmation, and conflict resolution. It is used widely at the elementary level and with children with special needs.

The Conflict Resolution Education Network (CREnet)
1527 New Hampshire Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20036

CREnet is the primary national and international clearinghouse for information, resources, and technical assistance in the field of conflict resolution and education. It promotes the development, implementation, and institutionalization of school- and university-based conflict resolution programs and curricula.

Creative Conflict Resolution Programs
Rachel Poliner
19 Garden Street
Cambridge, MA 02138

These programs include curriculum development and staff support for teachers, counselors, and administrators of

all grades. They focus on such themes as communication and appreciation of diversity. They demonstrate how to model appropriate behavior and provide techniques for teaching conflict resolution skills and strategies for integrating violence prevention into curricula.

Growing Communities for Peace
Julie P. Peterson and Rebecca Janke
16542 Orwell Rd. N.
Marine on St. Croix, MN 55047

This organization's peacemaking and conflict resolution programs provide schools and families with peacemaking skills they can use every day. The organization provides plays and service training for teachers of children ages 3-9.

One World, Our World
P.O. Box 436
Solana Beach, CA 92075-0436

This program is designed to initiate a school's conflict resolution program, but it can be used to boost an already existing program. It is recommended that the program be integrated into the social studies curriculum.

The Peaceable Classroom and School
Larry Dieringer, Executive Director
Educators for Social Responsibility
23 Garden Street
Cambridge, MA 02138

This program is designed to help educators create learning environments characterized by cooperation, appreciation for diversity, appropriate expression of feelings, responsible decision making, and nonviolent conflict resolution. The program is appropriate for preschool to high school students.

Peace by Peace
Bureau for At-Risk Youth
135 Dupont Street
P.O. Box 760
Plainview, NY 11803-0760

This program can be implemented in a middle, junior high, or high school. The program covers conflict, feelings, cultural diversity, and role playing. Guides, handouts, and posters are available.

Peace Works
Peace Education Foundation
2627 Biscayne Boulevard
Miami, FL 33137-4532

This model develops positive interpersonal and communication skills with special respect for human diversity. It teaches conflict resolution strategies to students of all ages. Guides, workbooks, videos, cassettes, and posters are available.

Program for Young Negotiators
432 Columbia Street, Suite B13C
Cambridge, MA 02141

This program is one of the most comprehensive and promising efforts to reduce student violence. It is a school-based program that builds problem-solving skills and empowers students through conflict resolution and appreciation for diversity.

Reducing School Violence Program (RSVP)
Education 21, Inc.
39 First Street
Troy, NY 12180

This program incorporates violence prevention with activities for instruction, parent-teacher workshops, and em-

pathy-building activities. The program is based on 20 years of research on empowerment and communication skills and focuses on family involvement.

Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP)
Linda Lantieri
RCCP National Center
40 Exchange Place, Suite 1111
New York, NY 10005

This is a comprehensive, school-based program in conflict resolution and intergroup relations. It provides a model for preventing violence and creating caring and peaceable communities of learning.

Second Step
Committee for Children
2203 Airport Way S., Suite 500
Seattle, WA 98134-2027

Second Step, a curriculum and violence prevention program for preschool through junior high, teaches children to change attitudes and behaviors that lead to violence and provides school-based social skills.

Skillstreaming
Research Press
Department G
P.O. Box 9177
Champaign, IL 61826

This program provides social skills training to children who display aggression, immaturity, withdrawal, and other behavior problems. It uses modeling, role playing, and transfer training. A guidebook, reproducible forms, audio cassettes, skill cards, and a video are available.

Students Against Violence
Gerri Holden
601 Marshall Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15214

Students Against Violence is a program designed to help elementary school students cope with conflict. It involves making students feel physically and emotionally safe and secure in their classrooms and instilling peace through songs, mottos, and stories.

Teaching Students to Be Peacemakers
David and Roger Johnson
7208 Cornelia Drive
Edina, MN 55435

Designed for grades K-12, this program is based on the cooperative learning approach and can be integrated into the curriculum. All students receive training in direct negotiation and mediation skills and learn to resolve conflicts with their peers.

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Bessie F. Gabbard Initiative on Leadership

The Bessie F. Gabbard Initiative on Leadership in Education for the 21st Century, dubbed the 2000-2001 Celebration for short, reaffirms the central importance of the Phi Delta Kappa tenet of leadership. Bessie F. Gabbard, the "First Lady" of PDK and a member and longtime chair of the board of governors of the Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, provided the impetus for this initiative, which will focus the energies of PDK members and staff during the two years of transition to the new millennium. During this 2000-2001 Celebration, special attention will be paid to leaders and leadership in education with a particular focus on PDK's traditional advocacy on behalf of the public schools.

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Two children visit the school dispensary for first-aid treatment in this 1912 scene from the Mayflower School in Cleveland, Ohio.

Courtesy of the Cleveland Public Library Photograph Collection.